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SOME ANIMISTIC BELIEFS AMONG THE TAOS OF BRITISH CENTRAL AFRICA.

By the Rev. Alexander Hetherwick, M.A., F.R.G.S., of the Blantyre Mission, British Central Africa.

The original home of the Tao tribe may be roughly described as the large and lofty plateau which lies to the west of Lake Nyasa, and is bounded by the Rivers Rovuma and Lujenda. Forty years ago, about the time that Livingstone first entered the country, they began to be pressed on the north by the Mayanganyek, and on the east by the Makuwa tribes. These invasions caused them to move, some westward down to the shores of Lake Nyasa or the banks of the Upper Shire River, and others northward to the Shire Highlands, Mount Zomba and the eastern slopes of Mount Mlanje. In every case they succeeded in either subjugating or expelling the original Mavezi or Mang'anja inhabitants of those districts, and in no case have they lost their own independence.

Till about fifty or sixty years ago the Tao were untouched by any external influences, and when at that time the Arab and coast trader from Kilwa and Zanzibar began to trust and trade with them they appear to have been little affected by contact with these visitors. Only a few of the younger men aped at following Mahommedan tenets, and these they only grafted on to their still cherished belief in the old faiths of their fathers. The Koran, or a few of its texts, was added to the many other charms they had already long about their necks. The faith which the first missionaries found them in possession of when they entered the country twenty-five years ago may therefore be held to be the undefiled creed of the tribe from time immemorial.

The foundation of the Tao religion is to be found in the *Roho*, the soul, shade or spirit which every human being possesses, and which is the inspiring agent in his life. They profess to give no definite description of the nature or characteristics of this soul. In their minds however it is allied with the shadow, and would seem to bear to the body the relation which a picture has to the reality. Their word for a shadow is *chiwiliti*, which is also the term that they use to denote a picture, and pictures they associate with the shades or shadows of the dead. I have known natives refuse to enter a room where pictures were hung on the walls "because of the *mzuka*, souls, which were in them." The photographic camera was at first an object of dread, and when it was turned upon a group of natives they dispersed in all directions with shrieks of terror. "The European,"

they said, "we shall be able to take away their shadows and they would die." In their mind the Snake was allied to the shadow or picture, and the removal of it to the photographic plate would cause the disease or death of the shadowless body.

As an instance of their faith in the close relationship of the Snake and the picture or shadow, I may relate the following incident. An influential Yan chief on Mount Zambe with whom I was on terms of intimate friendship for years, refused to allow himself to be photographed, fearing the consequence on his life. At last I was able to persuade him to give me a sitting, but on the sole condition that the picture was to be shown to none of his subjects but to be sent out of the country as soon as possible. He feared lest some ill-wisher might use it as a means towards his bewitchment. Some months afterwards the chief became seriously ill, and in the minds of his attendants his illness was attributed to some accident having befallen the photographic plate on which they believed the picture of their chief to be imprinted. If that negative had been broken in England, whither it had been sent, their chief's illness would be accounted for. Accordingly they appealed to the divining oracle, who, however, after consulting the "bela," assured them that the picture was intact, and that to counteract the disease must be ascribed to some other cause.

The Snake or soul is recognised as the chief agency in disease. To disease in the Yan tongue, *kompowolo nzambe*, whose *nzambe* is the plural form of *kinda*. The Snake is supposed to go out and visit the graves and persons in disease ghosts, and in turn is visited by the *nzambe* of others, dead or living. Pains in the body on rising from sleep in the morning are usually attributed to such nocturnal visits, while diseases or pains of a severe type are ascribed to mutilations by the whips of the *nzambe* or more frequently of the witches who prowl around during the night watches.

Blindness, idiocy and the ravings of delirium or disease are accounted for by a similar agency. The sufferers are the *nzambe*, they of the spirits, and a sudden fit of epilepsy or insanity is described as *pakowolo nzambe*, the spirits have seized him. Such persons are usually regarded with awe, as living in close contact with the unseen, but no incantations or enchantments are ever used to expel the spirit in possession. Some native doctors are credited with a knowledge of certain medicines which they say are effectual in such cases, but their application in no way differs from those employed in treating ordinary types of disease. Idiots and the insane are allowed to wander at will about the village, and only when violent symptoms show themselves as a danger to the community is any physical restraint put upon them.

The *nzambe* are also recognised as the inspiring agencies in the ravings of the witch detective. This person, usually a woman, is called in to discover who is the guilty agent in cases of mysterious deaths or outbreak of an epidemic at a village. She arrives on the scene and takes up her abode for a few days previous to her actual demonstration. She mixes with the people, hears all the scandal and gossip of the community, and at night prowls about the houses searching for

evidence. On the appointed day the doctor, Inpimo mundo, to decree the spirits or *kumunda*, to move or prophesy, and to the outrage of the dance she calls out the name of some, many who is afterwards accused of being the cause of evil. Followed by a crowd of excited spectators she dances through the village spear in hand, stopping here and there to dig up charms or medicines which the supposed witch has buried in the ground as the instruments of his occult practices. It is only in cases of supposed special difficulty, or when the magnitude of the supposed crimes demands that special measures be adopted for their detection, that the services of such a witch detective are called in. In ordinary cases these appeals are made to the divining oracle who consults his "bite" as a means of discovering crimes of this nature.

Among the Tiwa the human being is believed to be the sole possessor of a *kudu*. I have been unable to discover any trace of a theory that the *kudu* may pass into any animal or inanimate object and then confer upon it the nature or power of a *kudu*. Such belief is shortlived among the Angoni and Achewa tribes to the westward by Nyasa and the upper Shire River, and the intelligent Tiwa is aware of this, but he states that among his people no such belief exists. Even charms which have the effect of healing or warding off disease, or of protecting the owner from war or wild beasts or other danger by land or water, are supposed to possess this power without any idea of their being possessed by a *kudu* or other spirit influence. The nearest approach to such a theory is in the case of certain powerful "doctors" who have obtained special medicine by means of which, at death, they can transform themselves into lions, leopards, crocodiles, etc. Lepers also are sometimes supposed to become hippopotami. But both of these cases must be regarded rather as transmutations of body than transmigrations of soul.

It will be thus seen that the nature of the human *kudu* is closely allied to that of the *mundo*, which are the inspiring spirits in medicine and in the ministry of prophecy or incantation. What the origin of these inspiring *mundo* is, or to whom they belonged when in bodily life, the Tiwa holds no theory. He is content to accept them as they are, *mundo ipepe*, "*Just mundo and nothing more*," as he says.

It is, however, when we follow the disembodied *kudu* after death and consider its position and power in the other world that we find ourselves in a region of higher spiritual activities.

In dreams or in fainting fits the *kudu* leaves the body but only to return to it with the awakening consciousness. At death, however, it leaves the earthly abode never to return. It is now spoken of as having gone to *malonga* or *mlungu*. This word, which lies at the basis of all Tiwa theories of the ghost of the soul after death, will be dealt with later on as regards its derivation and connections in the Bantu family of languages. In its actual use it bears two significations.

I. The word *malonga* is in the first instance applied to the human soul or *kudu* after death when it is considered as an inhabitant of the spirit world. Even in life a man, when he meets with any piece of good luck, will be heard to say, "It's my *malonga*," as if his soul had an influence in determining the character of his

715 [illegible] But it is to its homes and after death, when it is considered as having an influence on the living and [illegible] of those it has left behind in the world and consequently as a power to be propitiated and honoured, that the term anlunga is more strictly applied. Freed from the body it passes to anlunga, and there is regarded as endowed with powers which it never possessed when alive on earth. To pray to such a spirit is described as kalawoko anlunga, to worship anlunga, never finds in this case. Such anlunga worship enters largely into Yer religious or social life. In almost every Yer village there will be found a shrine which is the centre of the worship of the inhabitants. It consists of a carefully built hut enclosed within a strong pen fence or hedge of a species of native plant. The hut itself is built of the most native materials—the walls of wooden posts, bamboos, and strong reed grass bound together with bark rope and plastered over with clay or stiff mud. The roof [illegible] grass laid on a framework of bamboos, and is generally covered with long strips of white or coloured calico. On the ridge or apex of the roof are fixed a couple of flags or an umbrella or two. One wall is usually left open so that the interior is easily seen. Within, from the bamboo rafters are suspended basket-work skulls, bunches of beads, etc., all offerings to the anlunga of the dead bestowed or chief from his friends and relatives. The floor is of clay carefully covered with mud in native fashion. A raised platform or mound of earth in the centre marks the spot where the grave was made. The [illegible] or officials who preside at the funeral ceremonies, first dug for about 4 or 5 feet down in a perpendicular direction, and then on the western side of this well they hollowed out a shallow cave in the earth. In this the body was placed, laid on its side with the knees bent up under the chin, and the face turned towards the east. Various articles of personal property were next placed beside the corpse, clothes, ivory, grass, cane, bone, etc., and the mouth of the cave closed up with wooden posts and a strong reed mat. The grave was then filled in and the surface carefully finished as we have seen. At the head of the mound a native pot was fixed in the ground for the reception of the offering of beer which is an almost invariable accompaniment of any act of worship paid to the anlunga of the dead.

Such a shrine marks the grave of almost every Yer chief or headman, and is regarded as the abode of his soul or the spot where his anlunga is most accessible. If his successor is about to undertake a long journey or enter on any warlike expedition against an enemy or neighbour, he must first [illegible] adopt, place an offering here to secure the favour and assistance of the anlunga of the dead. Should a long-continued drought endanger the prospects of the grain crop, the departed chief must be solicited to send the lacking rain. A feast is first prepared, almost always of beer, sometimes with the addition of native porridge, fowl, or game. The worshippers gather round the shrine bringing part of the food which they have prepared. Their priest for the occasion is the successor of the dead chief, sometimes one or other of the men who placed the body in the grave, or it may be that any other near relation of the dead man is chosen to represent the people and act as their spokesman. The nearer the relationship the more influence will he have with the dead.

with the dead. He approaches the shrine, opens the gate of the fence, takes a pinch of bran and passes it into the pot on the head of the grave. Next he places the basket of porridge and the plate of meat on the second bundle in mid entrance. Kneeling down outside the gate facing the shrine and a few yards in front of the people he shouts his prayer in a monotonous, sad, plaintive monotone with "Chauta, chauta," "Please, please." All the while the people clap their hands in unison with him and sing the responses as they do in a native court in the chief's court.

When the offering has been made at the grave, the rest of the beer or other food is consumed by the worshippers. Grave are fixed on a token of respect to the dead, and the rest of the day is spent in dancing.

Such shrines are to be seen in almost every Yao village where the inhabitants have been located for any length of time. They are regarded with awe—the little boys as they pass whisper to each other in a warning tone, "mandas." Should the village be moved to any other district, the old shrine is not forgotten. Periodical visits are made to it with the usual offerings. In cases where the old home has been occupied by a people hostile to the old inhabitants, such visits are usually made during the night, and the people awake in the morning to find that the old chief's grave in their midst has been newly repaired, and a fresh offering of food placed on the head.

Sometimes such shrines are found on the summits of hills which once may have been a refuge from the enemy in time of war, but which now lie lone and deserted. Thither in their need the people make their way with their offering of food and beer, and their prayers for rain or suitable weather for the crops. Near Mantyre such shrines are to be seen on the tops of Mount Sochi and Mount Michiru. The former is the abode of the spirit of Kankhomba, and the latter of Mpochila, both old Mawori or Mang'anja chiefs who doubtless fled there seeking safety from the war of the invading Yao, and died leaving their wounds to be the mahoyo or spirit of the mountain. Some years ago, during the time of an Angoni invasion, the Yao of Mount Sochi fled to the hill-top for refuge, and there the old chief Kapusi died. He was buried close to the grave of the old Kankhomba, and now, when the Yao on Sochi make an offering, it is to the spirit of Kapusi that the homage is paid, and the shrine of Kankhomba lies neglected.

Only the graves of chiefs or headmen are thus treated as shrines of worship. The burying place of slaves and the common people lies away in the thick bush, where only the rank grass or the thicket of old trees marks the spot. No offerings are ever taken there, for such as are buried there can have no influence in the spirit world. The dead are buried, the broken pot or basket is left on the grave to mark the spot, and none ever seek to go there save to lay another in the same neglected ground.

II. But the word mahoyo is used by the Yao with a wider application. Etymologically the word is connected with the root *kuloyoya*, which in so many of the other branches of the Bantu tongue appears as *kuka* or *kuwa*, and signifies "great" or "old." It is the same root which appears in the Kaffir word for God,

Ruhanaheide, which may therefore be rendered as "The old, old One," or "The great, great One." A like rendering may be given of the Yao form mulungu, the "Old One," or the "Great One." In this or a modified form mulungu (Swahili) is known to all the Eastern group of the Bantu tongues as the equivalent for "God." (See Fisher Tucker's *Comparative Grammar of South African Bantu Languages*). To term it as Fisher Tucker does in any connection with Mukasa, the god of the Waganda, is to attach undue weight to a chance coincidence of sounds.

As we have already seen, the word mulungu is applied to the human fetish when regarded as an object of worship, or as an inhabitant of the spirit world. But it is also used to denote that spirit world in general, or more properly speaking, the aggregate of the spirits of all the dead. The plural form of the word is rarely heard, unless when the allusion is made to the souls in their individualities. In the native use and form the word does not imply personality, for it does not belong to the personal class of nouns. Etymologically it is classed with the leg, heart, arm, hand, etc., of the human frame. Its form denotes rather a state or property inhering in something, as the life or health inhering in the body. Among the various tribes where the word is in use as we have described, the missionaries have adopted it as the term for "God." But the mulungu Yao refuses to assign to it any idea of being or personality. It is to him more a quality or faculty of the human nature whose significations he has extended so as to embrace the whole spirit world. Once after I had endeavoured to impress an old Yao headman with the personality of the Godhead in the Christian sense of the term, using the term *Mulungu*, my listener began to talk of "Che Mulungu," "Mr. God," showing that originally to him the word conveyed no idea of the personality I was ascribing to it.

And yet the Yao approaches closely to the idea of personality and a personal being, when he speaks of what mulungu has done and is doing. It is mulungu who made the world, and man, and animals. For in the interior of the continent, toward the north-west, beyond the plains and swamps of the Lwangwa River and Lake Bangweolo, there lies, in Yao legend, an island in the midst of a lake called Kapirilenya. On that island there is to be seen a large flat rock marked by the footprints of men and animals of all kinds. When that rock was more a heap of moist clay, mulungu created all living things and sent them across the soft mass, where their footprints remained to be afterwards hardened into the imperishable rock. Such is the Yao legend of the creation of the world, and mulungu is always the Great Creator.

Mulungu is also regarded as the agent in anything mysterious. "It's mulungu," is the Yao exclamation on being shown anything that is beyond the range of his understanding. The rainbow is always "mulungu," although some Yaos have begun to use the Mang'anja term "utawa Lesa," bow of Lesa.

Offerings are made to the spirit world or to mulungu as the great agency in the affairs of human life. Outside the village, or beside the headman's hut, may often be seen a rough shed. In this are placed the first-fruits of the new crop,

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grass snake, lizard, porcupine, goat, etc., or a thankoffering from the villagers for their harvest. This is described the Kalombo mulungu, or worship mulungu. At the foot of the tree in the village courtyard, where the men sit and talk or work, an occasional small offering of flour or beer is placed on any special occasion in the life of the village or any of the inhabitants. This also is Kalombo mulungu. A devout native sitting down to a meal will, before beginning to eat, take out a small morsel of the food before him and throw it at the root of the nearest tree as an offering to mulungu. On a journey a traveller will sometimes stop and lay a little flour in a pyramidal heap at the foot of a tree by the wayside or at an angle where two roads meet. This, like the others, is for mulungu, the spirit world, the guardian of the wayfarer on his journey.

Thus the Yao presents us with three stages of animistic belief :—

(1) The lowest finds or sheds, the agent in dreams, delirium, etc.

(2) This finds regarded as mulungu, and an object of worship and reverence, the controller of the affairs of this life, the active agent in the fortunes of the human race.

(3) And lastly, mulungu as expressing the great spirit agency, the creator of the world and all life, the source of all things animate and inanimate.

And yet between these three conceptions of the spirit nature no definite boundary line can be drawn. The distinction in the native mind is over of the faintest. No one will give you a dogmatic statement of his belief on such points.

It is only through long association with them in their daily life noting casual expressions of opinion or hearing of definite acts in relation to their worship or their dead, that one can get behind the reserve with which every Yao man or woman approaches or alludes to the spirit world which lies beyond and above this.